wherein:

at least one of the steps of creating and storing ensure maintenance of the characterized record for a minimum time period based on the pre-determined retention policy; and

the recipient will be unable to delete the record from the central repository prior to the end of the minimum time period established by the predetermined retention policy.

10.   [Twice Amended] The method of claim 8, wherein the index code identifies the contents of the electronic record and the recipient of the electronic record.

13.   [Fourth Amendment] In a distributed computing environment, an apparatus for managing an electronic record for compliance with a pre-determined retention policy of an organization, the apparatus comprising:

a computer system comprising at least one processor and at least one memory, the computer system being adapted and arranged for:

creating an electronic tag that uniquely identifies the electronic record, the tag having at least one field for characterizing the record;

storing the at least one electronic tag in a central repository;

sending the electronic record to a recipient; and

wherein:

at least one of the steps of creating and storing ensure maintenance of the characterized record for a minimum time period based on the pre-determined retention policy; and

the recipient will be unable to delete the record from the central repository prior to the end of the minimum time period established by the pre-determined retention policy.

17.   [Fourth Amendment] In a distributed computing environment, an article of manufacture for managing an electronic record for compliance with a pre-determined retention policy of an organization, the article of manufacture compromising a computer-readable storage medium having a computer program embodied therein that causes the computer network to perform the steps of:

creating an electronic tag that identifies the electronic record, the tag having at least one field for characterizing the record;

storing the at least one electronic tag in a central repository;

sending the electronic record to a recipient; and

wherein:

at least one of the steps of creating and storing ensure maintenance of the characterized record for a minimum time period based on the pre-determined retention policy; and

the recipient will be unable to delete the record from the central repository prior to the end of the minimum time period established by the pre-determined retention policy.